

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Ulbrich Precision Flat Wire

South Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership

South Carolina MEP Helps Ulbrich Precision Flat Wire Develop Roadmap for Future Success

Client Profile:

Ulbrich Precision Flat Wire, located in Westminster, South Carolina is equipped for rolling, drawing, annealing, straightening and precision winding a variety of flat wire products. Ulbrich is on the technical forefront of the metals industry delivering precision products to an increasingly diversified and global marketplace, expanding into the medical, solar energy and electronics industries. The company offers technical support and applications engineers who work directly with customer to determine product needs and specifications based upon customers processes, equipment, and specialized needs. The family-owned firm employs 100 people.

Situation:

Ulbrich Precision Flat Wire has sought to sustain progress particularly in the long-term. "We're trying to find applications for wires that are specialized, and find markets early in the lifecycle that have a lot of potential for future growth," said Ed Treglia, Vice President, Ulbrich Specialty Wire Group. "We want to be able to differentiate ourselves from our competitors, and bring the best value to our customers," said Treglia. Ulbrich Precision Flat Wire enlisted South Carolina Manufacturing Extension Program (SCMEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, to develop a strategic vision and plan, helping the division to maintain its elite status.

Solution:

SCMEP paired Ulbrich with management consultant, Linda Prince, who suggested the visioning program based on the following three fronts: 1) discovery -- the collection of data from employees at all levels, including leaders and associates; 2) feedback - giving the data to the principals; and 3) mission development -- the actual creation of the shared strategy. Common vision helps improve company culture and commerce because of the buy-in at all levels. At the same time, it fosters better organization and stability, necessary ends for Ulbrich. That's vital because the Westminster plant more recently merged operations with a smaller, Pennsylvania plant, increasing product inventory. "We've gone through so much growth," Treglia said. "We have to best structure our company to meet the needs for all our different applications." Essentially, each phase of the project served the same purpose: to help Ulbrich more effectively tackle the marketplace. "We really see more opportunities than we're able to address," Treglia said. "Our ability to grow is really constrained by internal, rather than external, forces. I expect us to have a common vision for everybody, and SCMEP has helped us to ratchet up new ideas to develop products."

SCMEP conducted a Competitiveness Review assessment that recommended organizing the facility into 'focused factories' consisting of medical, solar, diversified and steel segments. Ulbrich then engaged SCMEP to help introduce Lean manufacturing techniques and the 5S (Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, Sustain) program to its plant. SCMEP facilitated Lean training for company

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employees, which helped to eliminate workplace clutter and improve organization. The 5S implementation also enhanced workflow, streamlining processes, particularly in the solar-focused factory, where it was normally necessary. "We were involved in so many different markets with so many diverse requirements -- from a commercial and operational standpoint, to the way businesses typically have to be run," Treglia said. "We needed to better serve all those markets and all the different locations."

Results:

- * Increased sales by \$1 million.
- * Retained sales of \$2 million.
- * Realized \$150,000 in cost savings.
- * Invested \$75,000 in workforce development.
- * Created 5 jobs.
- * Retained 10 jobs.

Testimonial:

"With SCMEP, Ulbrich has clearly marked a path toward an even greater future. We continue to think of things SCMEP can help us with, from Kaizen training to sustained Lean efforts."

Ed Treglia, Vice President, Ulbrich Specialty Wire Group